The Views which Revelation exhibiteth of the General History of Man, considered.

A

DISCOURSE,

Preached before his Grace, CHARLES LORD CATHCART, His Majesty's High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, June 4. 1775.

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The Views which Revelation exhibiteth of the General Hiſtory of Man, conſidered.

ROMANS viii. 19. 20. 21.

For the earneſt expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifeſtation of the ſons of God.

For the creature was made ſubject to vanity, not willingly, but by reaſon of him who hath ſubjected the ſame in hope:

Becauſe the creature itſelf alſo ſhall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

RELIGION profeſſeth to derive its origin from the Author of nature; the claims of a particular revelation are therefore to be tried, in the firſt inſtance, by its conformity to the ſentiments which from nature we receive. The profeſſed aim

of the Chriſtian revelation, is to extend our views of the divine plan reſpecting mankind; not for the gratification of an idle curioſity, but to lay a deep foundation for moral obedience. For this purpoſe we are carried back to the moſt remote antiquity, to contemplate our nature in its native dignity, and in the glory of original perfection, from which it is now removed; we are directed to look forward into futurity, to behold the reſtitution of all things, and the advancement of good men to a new eminence in the kingdom of God, which is deſcribed by figures borrowed from the terreſtrial paradiſe, but which ſurpaſſeth it in ſtability, and in other reſpects which we are not concerned to know.

THUS it is clearly the eſſential doctrine of Revealed religion, That man doth not at preſent occupy that rank in the univerſal ſyſtem for which he is ultimately deſigned. And now we apply to Nature, not to know, whether ſhe hath

hath by her own powers diſcovered this truth; we have no right to demand ſo ſtrong an exertion; but we mean to inquire, if any veſtiges of her ancient glory are ſtill diſcernible, and if her ſentiments correſpond to a higher ſphere than that in which ſhe now moveth. Thus may wiſdom be juſtified in her children. And if the appearances of nature do indeed ſupport religion in this article, we will next endeavour, with due reverence, to trace the wiſe purpoſes of Heaven in this ſingular deſtination.

I. We are, in the firſt place, then, to inquire, What evidence can be brought from human nature, to prove that the original intention of the Creator, with reſpect to man, is not fulfilled in the preſent ſtate of things.

The prime intention of nature relative to every creature, muſt be a happineſs correſponding to its faculties and deſires. In a complex being, ſuch as

man is, this intention may be fruſtrated two ways:

Either if different powers of its conſtitution are diſcordant;

Or if its ſtate and circumſtances correſpond not to its faculties.

That diſcord prevails among the powers of the human ſoul, may be diſcerned without the trouble of a laborious inveſtigation. The apoſtle ſpake the language of nature, when he owned, that he felt "a law in his members "warring againſt the law of his mind." All of us have felt the power of contending principles, paſſion and duty ſtriving for dominion. All of us, I preſume, have often coolly diſapproved of our own behaviour, and have felt the keen edge of remorſe, when reflecting upon our paſt conduct. Let us not think ſo unworthily of him who made us, as to reckon this inward ſtrife and mental pain neceſſary from the original laws of our nature. The various principles of our conſtitution muſt have been meant to accord in the exacteſt harmony;

ny; behaviour ſuited to our frame muſt be phyſically good, and productive of our higheſt enjoyment: That internal diſcord, therefore, which robbeth us of our peace, and that vice which ſubjecteth us to remorſe, are unnatural, and foreign to the prime intention of our gracious Creator.

If it ſhall likewiſe appear, that the preſent ſtate and circumſtances of man are far from correſponding to his faculties, and that his poſſible attainments are inadequate to the capacities and deſires of his ſoul, Nature will ſeem in every view to countenance the doctrines of revelation, reſpecting the great lines of the divine plan.

In the exertions of imagination and of genius, Nature ſeemeth to recogniſe a ſtandard which ſhe cannot reach.

Epic compoſitions, the direct end of which is to exalt our ideas of human perfection, were the firſt productions of literary genius. In countries where philoſophy

loſophy and ſcience were unknown, works of this kind have ſprung almoſt inſtantaneouſly to a pitch of excellence which in the moſt poliſhed ages hath never been ſurpaſſed. The reaſon is, the authors took their ſentiments immediately from Nature; and in copying her ideas, it is very remarkable, that the pictures which they have exhibited of men and manners, are drawn greatly beyond the life, and exceed the experience of the world. We ſtudy theſe works with a peculiar delight; we catch the ardour which glowed in the author's breaſt; we feel a generous ambition of ſoul; Nature ſeemeth to dream of an ideal perfection.

In eloquence, the great Roman orator confeſſed, that his ſucceſs fell far ſhort of his aim; that he had an idea of a ſuperior ſtandard, which he ſhould never be able to reach.

The world hath beheld with admiration and reverence the bold attempts of the Stoic philoſophers. Their whole ſyſtem reſted upon this poſition, That the

the ſtate and circumſtances of man do not correſpond to his ſuperior faculties. Reſenting the oppreſſion under which a noble nature groaned, and regarding moral glory as their birthright, they ſtrove by force to reſiſt the powers of corruption, and to cruſh its uſurped domination.

Thus the recogniſance of a ſuperior ſtandard, as proper to our nature, appears in the capital exertions of the human genius.

THE evidence of paſſion may likewiſe be brought in proof of the ſame point.

Moſt men are enthuſiaſts in ſome particular line; and what elſe is enthuſiaſm, but the ardour with which an ideal glory is purſued?

The love of fame, though deemed a weakneſs, is attended with inconvenience merely through its unſuitableneſs to a ſtate in which it cannot be truly gratified. It is plainly meant to correſpond with that glory which is the reward of rectitude. The deſire remaineth

eth when the object is gone. Nature, forgetting her imbecility, ſtill reacheth towards the fruits of perfection.

But in morals chiefly is human imperfection diſcernible; let us attend then to that principle which is the judge of moral ſentiments and conduct.

Conſcience, conſidered as an approving and condemning faculty, how natural ſoever its operations may ſeem when it is viewed as a relique of a perfect ſtate, or however beneficial when regarded in reference to a glory which is yet to be revealed, is a part of our frame wholly unaccountable and myſterious, if the prime intention of the creator, relative to man, is fulfilled in the preſent ſtate of things.

From the perfections of God it follows, that every principle of a creature muſt, in the original intention of nature, have been meant to produce phyſical good. Moral conſcience is well accommodated to a perfect nature, where it operateth ſimply in the promotion of happineſs

happineſs by approbation; but applied to us, it is a right rule to a curve, to note its deflection. Moral diſapprobation is an agony of Nature, ſpringing from the recogniſance of her proper ſtandard, which ſhe cannot attain; moral approbation is an ecſtaſy of Nature, flowing from the perception of conformity thereto in a particular caſe. Conſcience is therefore a trace and veſtige of an original rectitude, which, in its energy, Nature recogniſeth, reaching towards the ſtandard, exulting in every inſtance of near approach, and, in her failures, feeling how lovely goodneſs is, though loſt; experiencing the anguiſh of diſappointment, in being deprived of a good to which ſhe claimeth right; and condemning the temper of thoſe affections and ſprings of action which leave her groveling in the duſt, inſtead of bearing her on eagle's wings to enjoy the beauties of holineſs, and to embrace the perfection for which ſhe was deſigned.

If any ſhould ſuppoſe, that a moral

conſcience is beſt adapted to an imperfect ſtate, becauſe there it hath the wideſt field for exerciſe, having room to condemn, as well as to approve, I will only appeal to the analogy of the human faculties.

A delicate ſenſibility in matters of taſte is truly exerted in condemning things uncomely and deformed, but it can never be ſaid to be naturally ſuited to ſuch objects. This faculty is in its proper ſphere, and conformeth to its final cauſe, only when, contemplating objects in which beauty and order prevail, it miniſtereth enjoyment to the poſſeſſor.

Diſcordant ſounds are perceived by the ſame faculty which is the approver of harmony; but it was never ſaid, that an ear for muſic is well ſuited to diſcord, or that it is properly ſituated where jarring ſounds grate upon its membranes: to reliſh harmony is its natural exertion.

The ſame reaſoning will apply to all our diſcerning powers. Conſcience is no exception; it is formed to reliſh moral good;

good; it is pained by what is contrary to its intention; it may even be enfeebled, if it is long deprived of its proper gratification, or much haraſſed with the object of its averſion *.

Of the preſent conſtitution of man, a moral conſcience is an eſſential part; a clear evidence that he is formed for a ſtate of moral glory: but unavoidable circumſtances reſtrain the exerciſe of this principle in its proper field; it here findeth much to condemn, and little to approve; a ſure indication, that the original ſtate of things muſt have undergone a change, that nature muſt have ſuffered ſome aſtoniſhing convulſion.

It will not be a ſufficient account of theſe appearances, to refer them merely to a future ſtate of exaltation, in which every ſource of joy may have ample ſcope for its natural exertion.

The idea of wiſdom in the Creator of

* This becomes the caſe where vice is formed into a habit.

the world obligeth us to maintain, that the faculties of every creature, as it came from his hands, muſt in all reſpects have correſponded to the circumſtances in which it was then placed. Our knowledge of the wiſdom of God is chiefly grounded upon the obſervation of this correſpondence, which, unleſs in the caſe of man, holds univerſally through all the orders of being; inſomuch that the accumulated force of a general induction might be brought to eſtabliſh the unvarying law of nature: and the ſame phyſical law thus inveſtigated, when applied to man, who, as a moral agent at leaſt, is now clearly an exception, will evince, that from the beginning it could not have been ſo; that the irregularity hath been contingent; that the faculties of the human ſoul, as parts of a nature in general, could not have been beſtowed prior to the poſſibility of their exertion in their proper field; although they may continue, and ſtruggle for gratification, after a change of

of circumſtances, and the removal of their objects.

The idea of goodneſs will carry us farther ſtill: On the one hand, even upon the ſuppoſition of a deſtined future exaltation, it ſeemeth unſuitable to every notion of this perfection in the Lord of nature, that he ſhould ſubject a whole race, in the firſt inſtance, without any forfeiture by themſelves incurred, to all the pain and unhappineſs which ariſeth from deſires ungratified, and faculties denied their proper exertions: and, on the other hand, upon the ſuppoſition of a violent and unnatural depreſſion of the race, it ſeemeth equally incongruous to the notion of goodneſs in the governor of the world, that he ſhould permit the continuance of theſe principles, which were ſuited to a ſuperior ſtate, but which ill accord to the preſent circumſtances of man; unleſs a reſtoration to eminence and glory is meant to be effected in behalf of thoſe who bravely ſpurn corruption; who, denied to the world, and ſpite of difficulties,

culties, labour to conform their lives to that ſuperior ſtandard which a moral nature recogniſeth.

If in this inferior ſcene our exiſtence had been meant to terminate, goodneſs would have required, that our natures ſhould have been actually reduced in the ſcale of being; that genius and imagination ſhould have been bound in the ſame humiliating fetters which reſtrain the powers of action; that our intellectual and moral faculties ſhould have been brought down to the level of our poſſible attainments; our thoughts and deſires confined to the limits of our ſphere. Since no ſuch degradation hath enſued, a deliverance from the bondage of corruption ſeems to be neceſſary for the vindication of the divine benevolence.

The doctrine of exaltation, then, in a future ſtate, is not ſufficient to account for the preſent diſorders in the human frame: but it ſtands connected with the ſubject in another reſpect, being an inference clearly deducible from theſe appearances.

THUS are the higher powers of the human ſoul to be regarded, both as traces of an original perfection, and as pledges of a deſtined reſtoration. The firſt openings of the divine plan reſpecting man accord to its final completion; and this intermediate ſtate, myſterious if conſidered by itſelf, becomes clearly intelligible as a part of one great whole. The appearances and ſentiments of Nature coincide with the firſt principles of Religion; Nature dreameth of an ideal perfection, Religion giveth the interpretation.

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PART SECOND.

THE diſorder which prevails among the principles of the human conſtitution, and the apparent incongruity of its towering faculties to that inferior line to which their energy is reſtricted, hath occaſioned much ſpeculation among thinking men in all ages.

For the ſolution of theſe appearances, the moſt ancient theory, ſpringing from the rovings of Oriental genius, reſted upon the idea of a malevolent deity, equal in power to the good God, and counteracting his gracious intentions. Some of the wiſer Greeks, aſtoniſhed at the prevalence of evil in a nature which they diſcerned to be fitted for intellectual and moral enjoyments, were led to ſuſpect, that man was here undergoing puniſhment for crimes committed in a pre-exiſtent ſtate. Among the moſt diſpaſſioned inquirers into nature in the claſſical ages, theſe ſeem to have been agreed

agreed points, That the human mind is here fettered through adventitious circumſtances; that the creature is ſubject to vanity, not willingly, but through violence offered to its ſuperior powers; and that death is to a wiſe man a deſireable event, as bringing deliverance from this bondage of corruption.

Among Chriſtian writers, much labour hath been beſtowed, and many diſtinctions invented, to reconcile the firſt introduction of diſorder into the human ſyſtem with the doctrine of a particular providence: but the new difficulties with which the inquiry concerning the entrance of evil hath been perplexed, did not in fact ſpring from the revelation of this doctrine, but from a ſtrange idea which prevailed in the leſs enlightened ages, that the conduct of moral agents, like the motions of the material ſyſtem, was governed by the reſiſtleſs energy of phyſical laws.

If we believe in the wiſdom of Providence, we muſt maintain, that the mode of its operations is varied in the differ-

ent orders of being, and in every caſe ſtrictly accommodated to the particular frame of creatures.

A phyſical conſtraint upon the will ſeems to be incompatible with a nature which is intelligent and active.

A power of deciſion, upon motives, by preference, acquieſcence, or refuſal, ſeems to be the ſpecific character of rational agents, as diſtinguiſhed from paſſive ſubſtances.

Every intelligent finite nature is therefore phyſically capable of vice.

To this poſſible contingency man hath yielded.

But as the world is conſtituted and governed by wiſdom, the behaviour of creatures, however free, muſt be underſtood as always tending to the accompliſhment of the benevolent deſigns of that being who bringeth good out of evil.

II. Let us then endeavour, with due reverence, to trace the wiſe purpoſes of Heaven

Heaven in this ſingular œconomy reſpecting mankind.

The moral principles in the nature of man, ſufficiently evince, that he was ultimately deſigned for a ſtate of eſtabliſhed virtue. But by what guards can human virtue be ſecured? Not by foreign reſtraint, and abſolute controul: This would be incompatible with that freedom which forms the excellence of moral conduct. Neither can native innocence be ſafe in the ſimplicity of its own intentions: Innocence grounded upon inexperience of evil, is naturally unſuſpicious, and liable to deception, having neither explored the ſnares of vice, nor known the conſequences which may follow the ſlighteſt deviation from duty.

Moral philoſophers have evinced, by the cleareſt analytical inveſtigation, that in order to render virtue ſecure from the aſſaults of temptation, and proof againſt deception, the united power of four diſtinct active habits are indeſpenſably requiſite.

quiſite. Theſe are, Juſtice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude.

Juſtice, or the love of rectitude, can be little more than a negative quality where its object hath never been heightened by contraſt: its energy muſt be feeble and languid in a mind which hath never known the deformity and effects of iniquity.

Prudence is no part of an original nature, but is clearly an adventitious quality, acquired by the habitual exerciſe of the judgement upon good and evil.

Temperance, or that habitual reſtriction of inferior propenſities, which is formed by repeated acts of ſelf-government, is the great ſecurity of virtue in a complex nature, ſuch as ours is. The firſt deviation from integrity was occaſioned by the defect of this controuling habit, which cannot be acquired where there are no ſuch generally felt, ſenſible irregularities of appetite and paſſion, as demand continued vigilance, and correction through diſcipline.

Fortitude, in every acceptation of the word,

word, is formed through the frequent preſence of danger.

If theſe cardinal virtues, theſe guards of integrity, are habits, and are only to be acquired by an uniform conduct under trials, diſcipline is eſſential to confirmed virtue: "The trial of your faith "worketh patience, and patience expe- "rience."

The only trials which can affect an intelligent being, are temptations to vice, or (which is the ſame thing) difficulties in the practice of virtue. But vice could have no charm, nor virtue difficulty, to a rational agent, unleſs there were moral evil in its conſtitution; that is, a propenſity to ſeek forbidden joys, and an imbecility in virtuous exertions. It was therefore neceſſary, that virtue ſhould be rendered laborious, and the practice of it difficult, through moral indiſpoſition, in the firſt ſtage of the exiſtence of an intelligent nature, that thenceforth its integrity might be rendered permanently ſecure, guarded by thoſe active ſubſidiary qualities which are the fruit

fruit of experience and of moral diſcipline *.

Thus, through the wiſe diſpoſition of the governor of the univerſe, the irregularities which prevail in the moral world, are made ſubſervient to the purpoſes of order and the general good; the diſadvantages under which virtue labours in the preſent ſtate, become the means of its final ſecurity; and we, like our maſter, are made perfect through ſufferings.

We ſeem then in part to have traced the wiſe purpoſes of Heaven in its ſingular œconomy reſpecting mankind, inaſmuch as it appears, that the permiſſion of diſorder, in the preſent ſtate, hath a tendency to procure the moſt

* The above general reaſoning ſeems *a priori* to render it highly credible, that happy creatures of the higher orders muſt, in ſome ſtage of their exiſtince, have been in a ſtate of diſcipline and moral probation. In the accounts which revelation giveth of the angelic natures, this ſeems plainly implied; for we are told of ſome who kept their firſt habitation, and are ſafe, and of others who fell from it, and were ruined.

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ſolid advantages in the view of a future exaltation; and that the final cauſe of the prevalence of moral evil, is the confirmation of virtue through diſcipline.

NOTWITHSTANDING theſe beneficial effects which follow the preſent conſtitution of things, there are appearances in nature, as hath been ſtated in the firſt part of this diſcourſe, which indicate a change in the human ſyſtem from a ſuperior mode of exiſtence; a ſtate once proper to our nature, in which the miſeries and the advantages of evil muſt have been alike unknown.

This then is another part of the œconomy of Providence, into which we may innocently inquire, and endeavour to trace the propriety of the divine conduct, in eſtabliſhing a conſtitution in a different form from that in which it was intended to continue.

THE excellence and wiſdom of this diſpoſition

diſpoſition, will be fully vindicated by two obſervations.

1. It is clear from antecedent reaſoning, that the work of a perfect being muſt be like himſelf. There is a ſenſible impropriety in the idea of a diſordered ſyſtem ſpringing immediately from the divine volition. That benevolence which is extended to the loweſt orders of animated being, would not be with-held in the formation of an intelligent nature. Thus both the perfection of the Author of nature, and the uniformity of his conduct, oblige us to maintain, that man could not have been formed with moral indiſpotion.

2. If the ultimate intention of the Deity reſpecting man, was a ſtate of ſecure felicity, founded in intellectual and moral enjoyments, the faculties which are ſpecially adapted to theſe future glories muſt have been implanted at the beginning, and muſt in every ſtage ſubſiſt as native principles of the human

man conſtitution; otherwiſe the nature would be eſſentially changed, when raiſed to a capacity of reliſhing ſpiritual enjoyments; and an advancement to new eminence in the kingdom of God, could not be effected but at the expence of perſonal identity. It hath formerly been ſhewn, that the ſuperior faculties of the human ſoul, which are adapted to a more excellent ſtate than that in which we now ſubſiſt, muſt, at firſt, have had ample ſcope for exerciſe in a proper field; and now it ſeems apparent, that ſuch ſuperior faculties muſt, from the beginning, have been proper to a nature which in any ſtage of its exiſtence is to be raiſed to the poſſeſſion of the objects which they reſpect.

An original rectitude, then, in a paradiſial ſtate, was a neceſſary part in the divine plan, that ſo, conſiſtently with the laws of order, man might be inveſted with powers ſuited to his deſtined heavenly inheritance. The

conſequent permiſſion of moral evil became neceſſary, that Virtue, the ſubſtance of ſpiritual enjoyments, might, through diſcipline, be confirmed, and rendered for ever ſecure.

Thus the propriety of the divine conduct ſeems abundantly apparent, in eſtabliſhing a conſtitution in a different form from that in which it was intended to continue.

It is highly credible, that beſides the facts and reaſons here ſpecified, many other circumſtances might be preſent in the divine mind, and various final cauſes reſpecting the univerſal good might concur, to mark the propriety of the peculiar œconomy of Providence in the articles which we have been conſidering. It would be preſumption in us to pretend to give the whole account of any of the diſpenſations of infinite wiſdom; but, in the reaſons above given, we have ſufficient grounds to acknowledge the excellence of the divine conduct,

conduct, reſpecting mankind in general, and to regard the diſpoſition of this part, in the ſcheme of things, as altogether worthy of its Author.

We will take leave of this ſubject with a general review of the manner in which it hath been treated.

The object of this diſcourſe is a defence of the views which revelation exhibiteth of the general hiſtory of man: theſe, in point of fact, have been eſtabliſhed from the appearances and ſentiments of nature; in point of propriety, vindicated by reaſon.

From the prevalence of diſcord among the principles of the human frame; from the incongruity of the circumſtances of man to his ſuperior powers, which appear to ſtruggle under adventitious reſtrictions; from the conſequent inferiority of his poſſible attainments, plainly inadequate to the capacities and deſires of his ſoul; and from the unavoidable operation of the

ſupreme principle, upon ſubjects to which it is ill adapted, whereby phyſical evil is neceſſarily incurred; it hath been inferred, as ſuggeſted by theſe natural appearances, that the prime intention of the Creator, relative to man, is not fulfilled in the preſent ſtate of things: and our reaſonings, from theſe appearances, have led us to regard them, at the ſame time, as indications of man's having once moved in a higher ſphere, and as pledges of a future exaltation.

We have next endeavoured to trace the wiſe purpoſes of Providence in the alterations which have taken place in our ſyſtem; and have found, that the preſence of moral evil is ſubſervient to the confirmation of Virtue, which may therefore be regarded as its final cauſe; while, at the ſame time, it hath been made evident, that the perfections of God, and the intended dignity of the human nature, required, that evil ſhould not from the beginning appear as inherent

rent either in the conſtitution or circumſtances of man, though afterwards it might enter as an adventitious quality.

SUCH are the proſpects of the general plan which Religion opens to our contemplation; and ſuch is the teſtimony which Nature and Reaſon bear to the certainty of revealed facts, and the wiſdom of the divine œconomy.

In theſe principles a deep foundation is laid for moral obedience. The active powers of our frame become ſtrongly intereſted on the ſide of virtue. To vindicate an exalted nature from ſevere oppreſſion, to reſtore harmony and order in the human frame, and to aſſert our claim to an inheritance, ſuited to our rank in the univerſal ſyſtem, and according to the prime intention of him who made us, are deeds of high atchievement, worthy of the towering ambition of the human ſoul. Through the aids which Religion affordeth, theſe

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are works which we have power fully to accompliſh. An obſtinate ſtruggle is to be maintained; but this is the diſcipline of Virtue, by which it is for ever ſecured from the powers of corruption.

FINIS.